

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
TRSE-00 ACDA-12 EB-08 OMB-01 /087 W
-----104921 161955Z /45

R 161516Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8484
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
COMICEDEFOR KEFLAVIK IC
CINCLANT NORFOLK VA
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 REYKJAVIK 0801

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IC
SUBJECT: ELECTION WATCH: WHERE HAVE ALL THE LEADERS GONE?

SUMMARY: LISTED AMONG THE MISSING IN ICELAND'S NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS ANY SIGN OF STRONG LEADERSHIP AMONG CHAIRMEN OF MAJOR PARTIES. INDEPENDENCE PARTY (IP) CHAIRMAN GEIR HALLGRIMSSON, AS PRIME MINISTER, IS MOST OBVIOUS TARGET FOR CRITICISM, BUT ALTERNATIVES ARE NOT MUCH BETTER. ELECTORATE SEEMS TO LONG FOR DAYS OF STRONG GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP BUT IS NOT GIVEN MUCH OPTION IN CURRENT ALTHING ELECTION. LACK OF STRENGTH AMONG LEADERS OF ALL PARTIES MAY SIGNAL DIFFICULTY IN COMING TO GRIPS WITH ICELAND'S SERIOUS PROBLEMS AFTER ELECTION RESULTS ARE IN. END SUMMARY.

1. CURRENT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS FAR FROM BATTLE OF TITANS AS FAR AS PARTY LEADERSHIP IS CONCERNED. IN GENERAL, PARTY CHAIRMEN LACK POPULAR APPEAL AND IN SOME CASES ARE UNABLE TO EXERT STRONG CONTROL WITHIN
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PARTIES THEMSELVES. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF IP CHAIRMAN GEIR HALLGRIMSSON. AFTER FOUR YEARS OF PRIME MINISTERSHIP, HALLGRIMSSON IS GIVEN MARKS FOR BEING GOOD, DECENT MAN BUT HIS LEADERSHIP ABILITIES ARE WIDELY CHALLENGED BOTH IN IP AND IN COUNTRY AT LARGE.

2. PM'S PROBLEMS WITHIN OWN PARTY GO BACK SEVERAL YEARS

TO THE FIGHT HE HAD TO WAGE TO GAIN IP CHAIRMANSHIP. SINCE THAT TIME, OPPONENTS HAVE GIVEN HALLGRIMSSON ONLY LUKEWARM SUPPORT, AND SOME SUSPECT THAT VARIOUS PROMINENT IP OLITICIANS MAY NOT BE ACITVELY WORKING FOR PARTY BECAUSE OF DISSATISFACTION WITH PRESENT LEADERSHIP. HALLGRIMSSON HAS COMPETENTLY MANAGED GOVERNMENT BUT THIS MAY BE ONE OF HIS PROBLEMS SINCE MANY INDEPENDENTS FEEL THAT HE HAS THEREFORE HAD LESS TIME TO DEVOTE TO PARTY MATTERS. PM WAS SERIOUSLY FAULTED FOR NOT ADVANCING DATE OF NATIONAL ELECTION TO FALL 1977 OR EARLY SPRING, A MOVE WHICH MIGHT HAVE PRODUCED BETTER RESULTS FOR IP IN LAST MONTH'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. PM HAS ALSO BEEN CRITICIZED FOR BEING OUT OF COUNTRY AT NATO SUMMIT AT TIME WHEN IP WAS FARING SO BADLY IN THOSE ELECTIONS AND FOR SURROUNDING HIMSELF WITH A SMALL COTERIE BY WHOM HE HAS BEEN POORLY ADVISED. RESULT IS SEVERE DISSATISFACTION WITH LEADERSHIP AT TIME WHEN MEMBERS OF IP TRY TO RALLY AROUND PARTY IN PREPARATION FOR JUNE 25 ELECTION.

3. IP LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS HAVE HAD SOME EFFECT ON VIEWS OF ELECTORATE TOWARD PARTY; HOWEVER, THIS HAS BEEN TEMPERED BY FACT THAT OTHER PARTIES AS WELL LACK LEADERSHIP WITH WHICH VOTERS CAN FEEL CONFIDENT. FORMER PRIME MINISTER OLAFUR JOHANNESON, CHAIRMAN OF PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PP), IS UNPOPULAR WITH ELECTORATE AT LARGE. HE MAY HAVE ABILITY TO CEMENT PARTY'S TWO WINGS TOGETHER FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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ELECTIONS, BUT MOST PROGRESSIVES PUT LITTLE FAITH IN HIS ABILITY TO ATTRACT VOTERS. HE HAS MAINTAINED NOTABLY LOW PROFILE DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN, AND HIS NAME AND PICTURE HAVE APPEARED RARELY, EVEN IN PP'S OWN DAILY.

4. AS FOR OPPOSITION PARTIES, PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (PA) HAD A DIFFICULT CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP LAST FALL. PARTY'S PROBLEM WAS THAT NO ONE WANTED JOB, AND POSITION HAD TO BE FORCED UPON LUDVIK JOSEFSSON, REPRESENTATIVE OF OLDER GENERATION OF PA. JOSEFSSON IS SEEN AS "INTERIM" CHAIRMAN, AND HE DOES NOT HAVE MUCH PERSONAL FOLLOWING. HE IS ALSO NOT PARTICULARLY STRONG IN ATTRACTING YOUNGER VOTERS ON WHOM PA HAS BECOME DEPENDENT IN ORDER TO INCREASE ITS SHARE OF VOTE. JOSEFSSN HAS THEREFORE BECOME RATHER INVISIBLE IN CAMPAIGN WITH HIS WORDS OFTEN COMING OUT OF MOUTHS OF OTHERS.

5. SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SDP), WHO HOPE TO MAKE GREAT GAINS IN ELECTION, ARE LED BY BENEDIKT GRONDAL WHO, AFTER TWO DECADES IN ALTHING, HAS VIRTUALLY NO SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS BEHIND HIM. WITH ONLY TWO OF SDP'S FIVE INCOMBENT MPS TO BE RRETURNED AFTER ELECTION

(THREE HAVE ALREADY LOST IN PRIMARIES), GRONDAL IS PARTY'S MOST EXPERIENCED PARLIAMENTARIAN, BUT THIS DOES NOT HELP SDP WIN VOTES. INSTEAD, PARTY IS PUTTING ITS HOPES ON A FEW YOUNG CHARISMATIC POLITICAL NEWCOMERS WHOSE APPEAL TO YOUTH AND TO DISENCHNATED IP VOTERS HAS ALREADY BEEN DEMONSTRATED IN PRIMARIES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 REYKJAVIK 0801

6. ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP HAS ALREADY PRODUCED CAMPAIGN FOCUSED LESS ON PERSONALITIES THAN IN PAST; ELECTORATE SEEMS LESS LIKELY TO BE DRAWN TO ONE PARTY OR ANOTHER ON BASIS OF IMAGES PROJECTED BY LEADERS THAN AS RESULT OF VOTERS' ASSESSMENT OF PART E ' ABILITY TO HANDLE PRESSING PROBLEMS. SINCE ALL PARTIES ARE WITHOUT STRONG LEADERSHIP, THEY WILL LIKELY FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO MAKE NECESSARY COMPROMISES REQUIRED TO FORM NEXT GOVERNMENT (THERE HAS ALREADY BEEN SPECULATION THAT SOME WELL-KNOWN FIGURE OTHER THAN THESE FOUR PARTY CHAIRMEN MAY BE CALLED UPON TO FORM GOVERNMENT). OVERALL IMPLICATION OF LEADERSHIP TROUBLES IS THAT NEXT PRIME MINSTER, LACKING WIDESPREAD POPULAR SUPPORT, MAY FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO TACKLE COUNTRY'S MAJOR ECONOMIC AND OTHER PROBLEMS.
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